Comprehensive Overview of Polyswagg versus New Zealand Street Dance

Executive Summary

This report delivers a thorough analysis of the New Zealand street dance scene, meticulously charting its historical progression, delineating its foundational styles, and critically assessing the classification of Polyswagg within this dynamic cultural landscape. It highlights the profound influence of Māori and Pacific Islander cultures, the scene's robust commitment to community building, and the inherent tensions that arise between commercialisation and authentic artistic expression.

A central finding regarding Polyswagg is its distinction as a globally impactful choreographic style, pioneered by Parris Goebel, rather than a foundational street dance form. This differentiation arises from its top-down, choreographer-led origins, its emphasis on pre-set routines, and its lack of development within the improvisational battle and cypher culture. Understanding this distinction is crucial for navigating the global street dance lexicon and appreciating the nuances of local community discourse.

The Aotearoa street dance scene is uniquely characterised by its deep cultural integration, particularly the incorporation of Māori concepts such as *whakapapa* (genealogy/connections), *manaakitanga* (hospitality/respect), and *mana* (sacred power/authority), alongside traditional Polynesian movements into contemporary styles. This cultural fusion positions the scene as a vital space for identity formation, resilience, and community support, especially for Māori, Pacific Islander, and LGBTQI+ youth.

Despite achieving significant global recognition, the New Zealand street dance community faces ongoing challenges, including limited funding, persistent societal misconceptions, and internal philosophical divides between different stylistic approaches. Nevertheless, strong community-driven initiatives, the leadership of

multi-hyphenate figures, and an unwavering commitment to preserving cultural roots position the scene for continued innovation and sustained global impact.

Introduction: The Global and Local Context of Street Dance

Defining Street Dance as a Cultural Phenomenon

Street dance transcends a mere collection of dance forms; it represents a vibrant cultural phenomenon that emerged organically from the social fabric of urban centres. Its origins trace back to African-American and Latino communities in the United States during the mid-20th century. These dance forms did not originate in formal studios but developed spontaneously in public spaces, including streets, dance parties, block parties, parks, schoolyards, raves, and nightclubs. Characterised as "vernacular dance," these styles are often improvisational and inherently social, fostering direct interaction among dancers and spectators. They served as a crucial outlet for self-expression, cultural identity, and social connection for underrepresented communities.

The genesis of street dance in these contexts reveals a profound aspect of its nature: it functions as a form of cultural affirmation and, at times, resistance. Given that these communities frequently encountered systemic marginalisation and lacked formal avenues for expression, the spontaneous creation and performance of these dances in public spaces circumvented traditional institutions that might not have been receptive or understanding of these new forms. The very act of dancing in the street, outside established norms, inherently carried an element of defiance against dominant cultural structures. This allowed marginalised groups to assert their presence, voice, and unique cultural identity in environments where they might otherwise have been overlooked or suppressed. This foundational characteristic underscores that street dance is more than just movement; it embodies a socio-political statement, a means of reclaiming space, and a powerful tool for identity affirmation and community solidarity in the face of adversity. This historical context is vital for comprehending its subsequent adoption and adaptation by Māori and Pacific Islander youth in New Zealand, who often faced similar societal challenges.

The Arrival and Adaptation of Street Dance in New Zealand

The introduction of street dance to New Zealand in the early 1980s unfolded through a dual transmission process. Initially, it was significantly influenced by American media, notably films such as *The Warriors* (1979), *Flashdance* (1983), and *Beat Street* (1984). However, a critically important parallel channel of transmission involved direct kinship connections from American Samoa, via Western Samoa, which facilitated a vital person-to-person cultural transfer of hip hop influence. This dual pathway ensured that dance forms were not merely observed but actively embodied and shared through existing social networks, leading to rapid adoption and creative reinvention by Māori and Pacific Islander youth.

The significance of these kinship networks in cultural transmission cannot be overstated. While mass media exposure provides a broad introduction, the person-to-person transfer through established social networks facilitated a more authentic, deeply embedded, and likely faster adoption process. Kinship implies inherent trust, shared cultural understanding, and direct mentorship, all of which are indispensable for transmitting nuanced cultural practices. This suggests that for culturally significant practices like street dance, especially within collectivist cultures, direct human connection and pre-existing social bonds often prove to be more potent vectors for transmission and adaptation than mass media alone. This mechanism ensures that the cultural nuances, underlying ethos, and inherent values of the dance are passed down alongside the physical movements, rather than merely superficial aesthetics. This mode of transmission profoundly contributed to the deep cultural integration observed in New Zealand street dance, as the foundational values and spirit of the dance were transmitted concurrently with the physical techniques, rather than simply being imitated from a screen. It also highlights the remarkable resilience and adaptability of Pacific Islander cultural networks in disseminating new forms, often bypassing or supplementing mainstream channels.

Defining Foundational Street Dance Styles

Core Characteristics and Principles

Foundational street dance styles are distinguished by several key attributes that set them apart from other dance forms. Their origin is rooted in spontaneous emergence

from specific urban communities and social contexts, developing organically in public spaces rather than within the confines of formal studios. A central tenet of these styles is improvisation, which emphasises the individual voice and the ability to "just move" and "exercise your own voice" in direct response to music. This improvisational skill is rigorously honed and continuously evolved within communal settings such as clubs, block parties, informal gatherings, and, most crucially, through dance battles and cyphers.

These communal environments, particularly battle and cypher culture, are indispensable for developing and showcasing freestyle skills. They foster creativity, originality, and challenge dancers to respond spontaneously to music and opponents, serving as vital proving grounds for the evolution of the style. While highly improvisational, foundational styles concurrently develop a distinct "vocabulary of moves" or "building blocks"—such as the 6-step in Breaking, the Jack in House, or various pops in Popping. These movements serve as a fundamental base for freestyle, and dancers diligently practice them to build a comprehensive "toolkit" and "technical foundation". Ultimately, authentic street dance styles achieve global recognition and are codified as integral components of the established "street dance" lexicon.

The Global Lexicon of Authentic Street Dance

The established global lexicon of authentic street dance encompasses a range of distinct styles, including Breaking, Hip Hop (encompassing party dances and freestyle), Popping, Locking, House, Waacking, Krump, and Vogue. These forms are widely regarded as the "foundational" styles, against which other dance forms are often measured in terms of their adherence to the core principles of street dance.

A compelling aspect of these foundational styles is the apparent paradox of codification within an art form primarily defined by improvisation. While spontaneity and unscripted creation are central to these styles, they also possess a "vocabulary of moves" and are "recognised and codified globally". This creates a seeming tension, as improvisation implies fluidity and unconstrained expression, whereas codification suggests a structured, established set of rules or forms. The resolution of this paradox lies in how these highly improvisational forms manage to achieve global recognition and transmission without becoming entirely prescriptive. It indicates that while the *execution* is spontaneous, there exists an underlying, shared *grammar* or

framework—the "vocabulary of moves" and "technical foundation"—that enables both individual expression and collective understanding. This codification is not rigid choreography but rather a shared language of fundamental movements and principles that facilitates communication and continuous evolution within the cypher. This dynamic is crucial for the longevity and global dissemination of street dance, allowing for continuous innovation and individual creative interpretation while maintaining a recognisable identity and lineage. This characteristic also highlights a key difference when compared to choreographic styles like Polyswagg, where the "vocabulary" is often tied to specific routines rather than a universally applicable improvisational toolkit designed for spontaneous creation.

Polyswagg

Defining Polyswagg: Artistic Vision and Distinctive Elements

Polyswagg is a distinctive dance form that has gained widespread popularity, largely through the efforts of acclaimed New Zealand choreographer Parris Goebel and her renowned crews, including The Royal Family and ReQuest Dance Crew. The style is widely recognised for its undeniable visual impact. Goebel herself articulates Polyswagg as a fusion, describing it as "combining sassy woman fire with aggressive inner strength" and deeply rooted in a profound connection to music. She emphasises "hearing, breathing and living the music, being passionate while dancing and transmitting feelings". The style explicitly draws "music inspirations from the Dancehall style" and integrates elements of hip hop dance and Polynesian movement, thereby reflecting a unique New Zealand street dance aesthetic that has been fundamental to the development of street dance in the country.

The repeated emphasis on "fusion" in the description of Polyswagg suggests a deliberate construction of a unique stylistic identity. For a choreographer-led style, defining itself through a blend of influences allows it to effectively differentiate itself from established, singular foundational styles. This indicates a strategic approach to branding and market positioning. By consciously combining diverse elements and articulating a unique aesthetic and emotional vision, Polyswagg successfully carves out a distinct niche that proves highly marketable on a global scale. This approach signals innovation and a fresh perspective, which are particularly appealing within the commercial entertainment sector. This highlights a common strategy in commercial

dance: to create a branded style by consciously blending existing elements and articulating a unique aesthetic or emotional vision. While this contributes significantly to artistic innovation and enhances global visibility for New Zealand dance, it simultaneously distinguishes Polyswagg from the organic, less consciously "branded" evolution of foundational street dance, where styles emerge from collective contributions rather than a singular artistic vision.

Why Polyswagg is Not a Foundational Street Dance Style

Within the dance community, Polyswagg is frequently categorised as a choreographic style rather than a foundational freestyle street dance. This classification is based on several critical distinctions.

Origin and Evolution: Choreographer-Led vs. Organic Community Emergence.

Polyswagg did not emerge organically from street, club, or underground jam communities. Instead, its development occurred within the context of competitive crew choreography and commercial entertainment, representing a "top-down, choreographer-led process" primarily focused on polished performances for stage and media. This stands in stark contrast to foundational street dance styles, which are characterised by a "bottom-up process" shaped by countless individual contributions within shared communal spaces. The emphasis on "competitive" and "commercial entertainment" inherently implies a drive for marketability, visual spectacle, and broad audience appeal. The focus on "polished performances" for "stage and media" suggests a priority on presentation, synchronisation, and reproducibility for mass consumption and global touring. This commercial imperative likely dictates the stylistic choices and developmental trajectory of Polyswagg. Choreographers, driven by the need to create impactful and repeatable content for performances and media, naturally gravitate towards set routines and visually striking "trademark motifs" rather than fostering unpredictable improvisation. This creates a feedback loop where commercial success reinforces the choreographic model, prioritising a unified, branded aesthetic over individual freestyle exploration. This distinction is not merely about the style's origin but about its very *purpose* and *function*. Foundational styles prioritise individual expression, communal interaction, and organic evolution, whereas choreographic styles prioritise audience engagement, commercial viability, and the realisation of a

singular artistic vision. This leads to divergent developmental trajectories and different criteria for "authenticity" within the broader dance community, as exemplified by the contrasting maxims of "FAKE IT 'TIL YOU MAKE IT" versus "DON'T FAKE THE FUNK".

Transmission and Core Practice: Set Choreography vs. Improvisational Tradition.

Polyswagg is typically taught and learned as set choreography, rather than as a social or cypher-based improvisational tradition. Its primary emphasis lies in executing pre-planned routines with precision and synchronisation. While Parris Goebel expresses that the style is about "feeling the music," this feeling is channelled into compositional work rather than spontaneous improvisation within a cypher setting. This represents a fundamental difference in how the dance is created, learned, and performed.

Foundation and Vocabulary: Trademark Motifs vs. Universal Freestyle Framework.

While Polyswagg incorporates distinct and recognisable movements that function as "trademark motifs" within Goebel's choreography—such as the "spine-defying Matrix bullet dodge," "caterpillar formation booty slap," and "glitchy, full body twerking"—these are elements embedded within specific routines. They do not constitute a universally recognised, improvisational vocabulary that is freely adaptable by a broad community. The focus appears to be on replicating Parris Goebel's specific style and choreography, rather than providing a framework for independent freestyle development.

Role of Cypher and Battle Culture: Performance Settings vs. Proving Grounds.

The available information does not indicate Polyswagg's active participation or development within freestyle cyphers or battle culture, which are essential proving grounds for foundational street dance styles. Its typical showcase occurs in polished performance settings, where the objective is a unified, pre-set display rather than

spontaneous improvisation. This absence from cypher culture is a significant indicator of its choreographic nature.

Community Discourse: Authenticity Debates.

Online discussions reveal a clear distinction drawn by practitioners between "hip hop (freestyle)" and "hip hop choreography," indicating a sensitive and frequently debated subject within the community. Criticisms often highlight the "reusing choreo" by Royal Family dancers, which directly contradicts the expectation of fresh, spontaneous creation inherent in freestyle street dance, where originality and individual creative spin are highly valued. The choreography community is sometimes labelled "trendy" by freestylers, implying ephemerality when compared to the enduring cultural roots of foundational styles. This perspective aligns with the "freestyle maxim" of "DON'T FAKE THE FUNK," which challenges perceived inauthenticity. This discourse is more than a casual preference; it represents a fundamental debate about what constitutes "authentic" street dance. The strong negative connotations associated with "reusing choreo" and the "trendy" label suggest a perceived threat to the core values of originality, spontaneity, and cultural depth that define foundational styles. This indicates that within the street dance community, there are guardians of authenticity—practitioners who actively define and defend the boundaries of what is considered true to the form. This protective mechanism arises from the organic, bottom-up origins of street dance, where individual contribution and communal evolution are paramount. Commercialisation and choreography are often perceived as potentially diluting these core values, prompting a protective response from the community. This internal tension highlights the ongoing struggle within cultural forms as they gain mainstream recognition. It underscores the importance of community-driven validation for a style to be considered "foundational," rather than relying solely on commercial success or widespread popularity. It also suggests that for Polyswagg to gain foundational recognition, it would need to address these deeply ingrained community values and practices.

To further clarify these distinctions, a comparative analysis is presented below:

Table 1: Foundational Street Dance vs. Polyswagg: A Comparative Analysis

Criteria	Foundational Street Dance	Polyswagg
Origin	Organic/Bottom-up Community Emergence	Choreographer-led/Top-down Commercial Development
Core Practice/Transmission	Improvisational/Social/Cypher-based	Set Choreography/Performance-focused
Movement Vocabulary	Universal/Adaptable Freestyle Vocabulary	Trademark Motifs/Routine-specific
Role of Cypher/Battle Culture	Central to Development/Proving Ground	Minimal/Absent
Community Perception/Discourse	Authenticity/Originality Valued ("DON'T FAKE THE FUNK")	Commercial/Trendy/Reused Choreo Criticisms ("FAKE IT 'TIL YOU MAKE IT")

Influences and Potential Pathways to Foundational Recognition for Polyswagg

Polyswagg is explicitly described as drawing "music inspirations from the Dancehall style". While it incorporates elements from Dancehall, a recognised street dance, the available information does not indicate that Polyswagg practices Dancehall's foundational elements in a freestyle context. Furthermore, authentic Dancehall is

culturally specific, deeply tied to those "born, living and breathing the culture in Jamaica". The style also fuses elements of hip hop dance and Polynesian movement, reflecting a distinct New Zealand street dance aesthetic.

For Polyswagg to achieve foundational recognition, it would necessitate a deliberate shift towards fostering organic community growth and embracing the core tenets of freestyle street dance. This would involve actively fostering organic community engagement, codifying foundational movements specifically for freestyle application, integrating into battle and cypher culture, placing a strong emphasis on originality and individual expression, deepening its cultural lineage, and pursuing academic recognition. Crucially, this would require decentralising creative ownership from Parris Goebel to a broader community. The challenge inherent in this lies in the fundamental conflict between a commercially successful, artist-driven brand and the organic, communal evolution required for a foundational street dance. Polyswagg is described as a "choreographer-led process" with "trademark motifs" strongly associated with Goebel, implying a strong, singular artistic vision and control, characteristic of a commercial brand. Foundational styles, conversely, emerge from "countless individual contributions" and are collectively owned. Decentralisation would mean Goebel (and her associated entities) relinquishing a degree of control, allowing the style to be freely interpreted, innovated upon, and even transformed by a wider community, potentially without direct attribution or commercial benefit to her. This represents a significant paradigm shift from a proprietary artistic product to a shared cultural movement. This highlights a critical barrier for commercially successful, choreographer-led styles seeking to transition into foundational status. It is not merely about the movements themselves, but about the *governance*, *ownership*, and *transmission* of the style. True foundational status implies a shared, evolving cultural property, not a proprietary artistic product. This also raises complex questions regarding intellectual property in dance and its intersection with cultural heritage and community practice.

The Historical Evolution of Street Dance in New Zealand

The history of street dance in New Zealand is a profound and dynamic narrative, illustrating cultural adaptation, artistic expression, and robust community building within the nation.

Early Footprints and the "Bop" Era (1980s)

Street dance made its initial impact in New Zealand during the early 1980s, primarily influenced by American media, including films like *The Warriors* (1979), *Flashdance* (1983), and *Beat Street* (1984). A crucial parallel channel of influence came through direct kinship connections from American Samoa, via Western Samoa, which facilitated a vital person-to-person cultural transfer of hip hop. This dual transmission mechanism ensured that dance forms were actively embodied and shared through existing social networks. Māori and Pacific Islander youth rapidly embraced and reinvented these styles, integrating movements from traditional dances and adopting local slang such as "bopping," a localised pronunciation of "popping". Early competitions, including the "Boppalympics" (1984) and the televised "Shazam Bop Competition" (1985), played a significant role in formalising the art form and substantially increasing national exposure for breaking and popping.

The appearance of these early competitions, particularly the televised "Shazam Bop Competition," on national media platforms represents a significant move from underground origins into mainstream visibility and acceptance. While street dance originated in informal, underground spaces, its transition to national television and formal competitive structures signals a shift from a niche subculture to a more widely recognised art form. This mainstream exposure played a crucial role in legitimising the practice, broadening its appeal beyond its initial subculture, and accelerating its national integration. This visibility contributed to increased participation, fostered greater public understanding, and opened potential avenues for professional opportunities, even if such formalisation later introduced tensions with authenticity. This early engagement with televised competitions foreshadowed the subsequent professionalisation of the New Zealand street dance scene, indicating a willingness from its nascent stages to engage with broader platforms for growth and recognition. This dynamic would ultimately contribute to the emergence of globally recognised figures and institutions, such as Parris Goebel and The Palace Dance Studio.

Maturation and Diversification (1990s)

The 1990s marked a pivotal period for New Zealand street dance, leading to the development of a distinct local hip hop identity and notable commercial success. This decade saw the scene evolve beyond mere imitation, beginning to forge its own unique flavour. The integration of House music, with its characteristic footwork and body isolations, became a central feature of nightlife, significantly broadening the stylistic palette available to New Zealand dancers. Concurrently, the "Urban Pasifika" sound emerged, blending hip hop with Pacific and Māori musical elements. Artists like Upper Hutt Posse, with "E Tu" (1988), and OMC, with "How Bizarre" (1995), achieved significant success, cementing Auckland's status as a cultural epicentre.

The concurrent development of a unique musical genre like "Urban Pasifika," which explicitly fused local cultural elements with hip hop, directly paralleled the dance scene's adaptation and indigenisation. Music provides the rhythm, mood, and often the lyrical content that dancers interpret and embody, acting as a direct inspiration for movement. This indicates a symbiotic relationship where the evolution of local music directly fuelled and shaped the identity of the local dance scene. The "Urban Pasifika" sound provided a culturally resonant soundtrack for dancers, enabling them to express their unique heritage through movement. This deep connection between local music and dance reinforced the "Aotearoa flavour" of the scene and strengthened its distinct cultural identity. This highlights how cultural identity in street dance is not solely about movement vocabulary but is profoundly intertwined with the sonic landscape. The success of "Urban Pasifika" artists provided a powerful cultural anchor and a sense of belonging for dancers, contributing significantly to the scene's resilience and distinctiveness, making it more than just a transient dance trend.

Professionalisation and Exponential Growth (2000s-2010s)

This period witnessed a clear evolution from the informal beginnings of street dance to a structured, multi-faceted ecosystem in New Zealand. This marked a significant maturation of the scene, moving towards greater organisation and formalisation. Dance academies, such as The Palace Dance Studio, founded in 2009 by Parris Goebel's family, emerged as powerhouses, nurturing internationally successful crews like The Royal Family and ReQuest. Further formalising street dance education, En Beat Dance Academy, co-founded by Rina Chae and Mr. Zee in 2019/2020, began offering comprehensive training in foundational styles. This era was characterised by the creation of formal educational pathways, professional opportunities, and

community-driven initiatives within the scene. These developments provided structured avenues for dancers to pursue their passion as a career.

This formalisation and professionalisation, while beneficial, can be seen as a double-edged sword. On one hand, it brings increased visibility, potential funding opportunities, and clearer career paths for dancers. On the other hand, it introduces a potential tension with the "organic," "bottom-up" origins of street dance. Formal institutions may, by their nature, standardise or commercialise elements that were once spontaneous and community-driven, potentially diluting their original essence. This tension is evident in the community discourse around choreographic versus freestyle authenticity. However, this formalisation also provides stability and resources, enabling talents like Parris Goebel to achieve global recognition and elevate the overall profile of New Zealand dance on an international stage. This dynamic underscores the ongoing negotiation within the street dance community as it balances growth and commercial success with the preservation of its foundational values and authentic spirit.

Key Street Dance Styles in New Zealand

New Zealand's street dance scene is rich with a diverse array of foundational styles, each with its own history, key figures, and unique cultural adaptations within the Aotearoa context.

Breaking (B-boying/B-girling)

Breaking, which originated in the Bronx, New York, in the early 1970s, is rooted in the "break" sections of funk music. It is characterised by dynamic up-rocking, drops, intricate footwork, powerful power moves (such as windmills and head spins), and freezes. Its inherently competitive essence fuels continuous evolution. In New Zealand, its adoption by Māori and Polynesian youth was profound, offering a vital channel for identity and recognition, particularly for those facing socio-economic disparities. The ethos of Breaking in New Zealand has been shaped by the influence of Māori concepts like *whakapapa* (genealogy/connections), *manaakitanga* (hospitality/respect), and *mana* (sacred power/authority). Traditional Polynesian dance elements, such as Māori Haka (integrated by Justin Haiu) and Samoan *fa'ataupati* (slap dance) and Tongan *lakalaka*

(integrated by John Vaifale "Happyfeet"), have been integrated, contributing to a distinct "Aotearoa flavour".

Key figures in the New Zealand Breaking scene include Taupuhi Toki (Bboy Papa Smurf), David McCavitt (Grub-D), Leerok, Sheldon Rua, and Daniel Jang (Simba). Prominent crews include Instance Movement (ISM), Common Ground Crew, and The Projekt Team. Significant events like "Pop, Lock & Break it" (3v3 battles), Parley, and Street Talk Summits provide platforms for performance and community engagement. Despite its vibrancy, the Breaking scene faces challenges such as a lack of consistent funding and support, an "80s stereotype hangover" leading to outdated public perceptions, and low B-girl participation. Breaking's debut at the Paris 2024 Olympics, followed by its exclusion from the 2028 games, further highlights the ongoing funding and representation challenges for New Zealand dancers.

Popping

Popping is a street dance style that involves rapidly contracting and relaxing muscles to create a jerking effect, known as a "pop" or "hit," often combined with posing. Originating from Oakland/Fresno, California, in the late 1970s, it encompasses various sub-styles including Boogaloo, Waving, Tutting, Robot/Botting, Animation, and Gliding/Floating/Sliding.

New Zealand pioneers of Popping include Ross Smith (Future/Ra Smith), River Vili (Mase Boog), Diana Hu (Dianamite), and Seidah Tuoai (Popping Puletasi), who notably fuses popping with Samoan traditional dance and attire. The Auckland Popping Community/Club (APC) serves as a key community hub. Events such as Red Bull Dance Your Style NZ (where John Vaifale was the 2023 champion) and Pop What You Got provide competitive and showcase opportunities. The scene also benefits from workshops with international legends like Mr. Wiggles, Hozin, and Suga Pop, fostering global connections and skill development.

Locking

Locking, also known as Campbellocking, emerged in Los Angeles in the late 1960s as a funk dance. It is characterised by its signature "locking" movements—freezing from a fast movement and "locking" into a position—distinct arm and hand movements, and often comical poses.

Key figures in New Zealand Locking include Mele "Marshmele" Taeiloa, who serves as Head of Learning Area for Dance at Manurewa High School and is an international competitor, John Vaifale (HappyFeet), Rina Chae, Mr. Zee, and John Bernardo (JB/Prevail). Organisations such as NZ Lockers and NZ Campbellockers support the community. Events like the "Pop, Lock & Break it" 3v3 Street Dance Battle and Projekt Feel Good provide platforms for performance and community engagement. The Locking scene benefits from opportunities in formal education, international exchange, and a robust calendar of community events.

Krump

Krump is an intensely expressive and energetic street dance style that originated in South Central Los Angeles in the early 2000s. It emerged as a positive outlet for emotional release and an alternative to gang life, with its spiritual foundation rooted in "Kingdom Radically Uplifted Mighty Praise" (K.R.U.M.P.). The style is characterised by powerful stomps, jabs, chest pops, and arm swings.

Krump gained popularity in New Zealand around 2005, significantly influenced by the documentary *Rize*. Early figures who popularised the style include Aaron Hardy (AE), Kevin Griffiths (AKC), Israel Adesanya (Black Majik/Big Llow), and Joash Fahitua, who hosted the first New Zealand Krump competition. The style has spread regionally to areas such as Waikato (Villainz fam), Rotorua (Jese Tuivoavoa), Wanganui (Bully Nerdz), and Hawkes Bay (Jaesyn Kelly). Formalisation of the scene includes the establishment of Krump Aotearoa, a support network with a YouTube channel launched in 2012, and the annual NZ Krump Nationals. Influential Krump families (fams) include EXCBS Krump Fam (Chris Teava), 12 Fam (Trenton Omeri), The Pirates Global, Watch:MIN crew (which amplifies women in Krump, led by Ennoalla Paea-Vaega), Lighthouse Fam (Ken Vaega), and XIII WRLD collective (Byrin Mita), and Hyperush Empire (Alexander "Aktive" Teratuia).

New Zealand Krumpers have achieved significant international recognition, with Ken Vaega (Lightsaber) becoming the first New Zealander to win the Krump World Championships in 2018. Young talents like Rian Gounder (Prince Lightsaber) and Raul Gounder (Yg Lightsaber) have also achieved top placements internationally, and Stacy Meng (Baby XIII) won the Youth Division All Styles at Step Ya Game Up 2023 in NYC. The style has a deep cultural resonance with Māori and Pasifika cultures, with notable similarities observed between Krump and Haka, particularly in their use of stomping,

powerful movements, storytelling, and the embodiment of *wairua* (spirit). Krump serves as a "tool of resilience" for Pasifika Krumpers, providing a positive outlet against gang life and supporting mental well-being. Despite its positive impact, Krump faced early challenges due to misconceptions, being perceived as "ugly" or "violent," leading to societal and institutional barriers. The establishment of Silo Sessions in Auckland in 2025 is anticipated to provide a dedicated hub for Krump, further solidifying its presence.

Waacking

Waacking originated in Los Angeles during the 1970s, pioneered by the Black and Spanish gay community amidst the disco culture, protests, and oppression of the era. It is characterised by dramatic arm movements, intricate posing, and theatricality, typically performed to disco funk music. The style draws inspiration from Hollywood glamour of the 1940s-1950s female movie stars and 1970s martial arts films.

In New Zealand, key pioneers include Jaydess Nand, recognised as the nation's foremost expert, co-founder of The Jaackers, and creator of "Desi Waack," which fuses Indian heritage into the style. Rina Chae is another influential figure, serving as Mother of the Imperial House of Waacking NZ chapter, Dance Liaison for Red Bull Dance Your Style 2023, co-director of En Beat Dance Academy, and founder of Street Candee. Collectives such as The Jaackers NZ (New Zealand's first dedicated Waacking company, established in 2015), Imperial House of Waacking NZ (IHOW NZ), Candee Waackers, and Prowl Productions (which specifically focuses on queer and POC communities) are central to the scene. Events like 'Waack It Out' (New Zealand's first formalised Waacking competition), 'Whats Yo Style', and Ladies of Hip Hop Aotearoa (HERSTORY) provide platforms for the style. Waacking holds significant cultural impact, celebrating LGBTQIA+ and diverse cultural identities, and utilising *whakapapa* to honour the Queer Black Indigenous People of Colour (QBIPOC) forefathers of Waacking. The style is integrated across various dance contexts, fostering cross-pollination of styles within the broader community.

Vogue/Ballroom

Vogue dance originated in the Harlem ballroom scene in the 1960s, primarily within African American and Latino LGBTQ+ communities. It is a highly stylised house dance inspired by fashion models and Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, characterised by poses,

fluidity, swift transitions, spins, and dips. The ballroom scene provided a crucial space for self-expression and the formation of surrogate families in response to pervasive racism and queerphobia.

In New Zealand, the formal establishment of the Vogue/Ballroom scene began in 2013, initiated by the FAFSWAG Arts Collective (Pati Solomona Tyrell and Tanu Gago). The first vogue balls were held in Ōtara in 2013, facilitated by Mother Mistress Coven-Carangi. Key figures in the New Zealand scene include Pati Solomona Tyrell, Tanu Gago, Mother Mistress Coven-Carangi, Roy Aati (an early practitioner inspired by *Paris Is Burning*), Jaycee Tanuvasa (founder of House of Iman, a pioneer), Falencie Filipo, Moe Laga, Karamera and Romé (co-founders of Kiki House of Marama), and Mother Honey Givenchy (Logan Collins), and Mother Venus. The "Houses" within the ballroom structure serve as chosen families, providing critical support, belonging, and safety, particularly for queer youth. "Mother" and "Father" figures lead these houses, mentoring members in both dance and life skills. "007s" (free agents) are performers not formally affiliated with a house, offering freedom and a pathway to potential recruitment. Established houses include House of Aitu, House of Coven (which evolved from Coven-Carangi/Aucoin), and House of Iman, with the emergence of Kiki House of Marama and Avant House of Dawn. Events such as the Legacy Vogue Ball (Auckland Arts Festival, a collaboration of main houses), The Fictional Ball (Wellington), Matala Ball (a youth ball), Dusk 'til Dawn Kiki Ball, and Through the Eras Kiki Ball, and Ahua Fashion Week, provide platforms for expression and competition. Community workshops, often in partnership with institutions like Te Papa, teach fundamentals and history. Geographically, the scene originated in South Auckland (Ōtara, 2013), shifted to central Auckland (2016) for increased visibility, and has expanded nationwide to Wellington and Blenheim. The involvement of national cultural institutions like Te Papa signifies its growing mainstream integration. Vogue/Ballroom holds profound cultural significance as a vital sanctuary for LGBTQI+ Pacific Islander communities, offering safe spaces and chosen families. It challenges conservative values by providing an unapologetic platform for fluid gender and sexuality, serving as a powerful medium for identity, self-expression, and cultural restoration for Māori and Pacific LGBTQI+ artists, incorporating "Rainbow Pacific Pride".

House Dance

House dance developed in Chicago and New York City underground clubs during the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is characterised by its signature groove "Jack," along with foundational steps like the Two Step, Shuffle, and Heel-Toe moves.

In New Zealand, House dance was influenced by a "Polynesian cultural renaissance" in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) during the early-to-mid 1990s, with local House tracks incorporating Polynesian influences. A "golden moment" in the early 2000s further propelled the local scene. Community growth was formalised with the creation of the Auckland House Dance Community (AHC) Facebook group by Lawrence Liew in 2014, later renamed HOUSE DANCE NZ – (HDNZ) with Jazmine Cox joining as an administrator. FALEHEDDZ, founded by Sheldon Rua in 2023, fosters dialogue and preserves the style's origins. The HipHop & House Dance Headz / HipHop Househeads Aotearoa, led by Mr. Zee, continues to expand the community. Key figures include Lawrence Liew, John Bernardo (JB, Prevail), Jazmine Cox, Mr. Zee (Zed Nufable), Ken Vaega (Lightsaber, MC for LH Combine Monday House jams), and John Vaifale (Happyfeet, a versatile freestyler and DJ). Workshops, such as the Free House Dance Workshops offered as part of "Ladies of Hip Hop Weekend" and foundational House classes at En Beat Dance Academy, contribute to skill development and community engagement.

Overarching Themes and Dynamics in NZ Street Dance

The New Zealand street dance scene is a vibrant tapestry woven with distinct cultural threads and dynamic internal forces. Several overarching themes define its unique character and ongoing evolution.

Cultural Fusion and Identity

New Zealand's street dance scene is profoundly shaped by the deep integration of Māori and Pacific Islander identities. This is evident across multiple facets. Linguistically, local terms like "bop," derived from the Samoan pronunciation of "popping," highlight indigenous influence. In terms of movement, there is a clear fusion of traditional elements, such as Samoan Sasa (slap dance) and Cook Islands dance, into routines by early New Zealand street dance groups [NZ street dance notes]. Samoan *fa'ataupati* and Tongan *lakalaka* are integrated into B-boy fusion by dancers

like John Vaifale, and Seidah Tuoai's "Popping Puletasi" uniquely fuses Samoan traditional dance with popping. Philosophically, the scene aligns with Māori concepts like *whakapapa* (genealogy/connections), *manaakitanga* (hospitality/respect), and *mana* (sacred power/authority). The parallels between Krump and Māori Haka, particularly in their powerful movements and embodiment of *wairua* (spirit), are frequently noted. Artistically, dance is used for storytelling that resonates with indigenous experiences, exemplified by Seidah Tuoai's film on the Dawn Raids. Furthermore, the scene actively promotes representation, with figures like Byrin Mita striving for Māori representation in street dance, and the Vogue/Ballroom scene empowering "Queer Brown bodies".

Community Building and Mentorship

A core tenet of the New Zealand street dance scene is its unwavering prioritisation of community development and youth empowerment. This is manifested through the formation of "chosen families," such as the "Houses" in ballroom culture and "fams" in Krump, which serve as vital support networks and safe spaces, particularly for queer youth or those lacking biological family support. Organisations like The Projekt Team, led by Josh Mitikulena, are dedicated to creating open and accessible environments, ensuring participation is not hindered by prohibitive fees. Events like Projekt Feel Good provide positive and safe spaces for expression, and the Krump Club of Ōtara offers a secure environment for children to learn Krump. A robust mentorship system, often structured with "lil homies" and "big homies" in Krump, ensures that skills, values, and the ethos of the dance are passed down across generations. Original Gangsters (OGs) or pioneers are crucial for transmitting historical knowledge and cultural roots, preserving the lineage of the styles.

Professionalisation vs. Authenticity

The evolution of street dance from its raw, public origins to sponsored competitions, formal studios, and festivals has brought increased visibility but has also ignited debates concerning artistic authenticity and the perception of "selling out". While certain commercial successes, such as Parris Goebel's Polyswagg, undoubtedly inspire, they also raise concerns about cultural appropriation, as seen in debates surrounding Haka, and the potential dilution of the essential spirit of street dance. The maxim "FAKE IT 'TIL YOU MAKE IT" is sometimes associated with choreography, standing in direct contrast to freestyle's guiding principle of "DON'T FAKE THE FUNK". The

concept of "street" in street dance is no longer solely defined by physical location; it has expanded into digital "networked mediascapes," offering new opportunities but also posing risks of superficiality and the erosion of authentic lineage. Within the community, there is a strong call for deeper education that extends beyond mere technique, emphasising the importance of understanding style origins, crediting pioneers, and respecting the inherent power of freestyle.

Challenges Faced by the NZ Scene

Despite its vibrancy and global achievements, the New Zealand street dance scene navigates several significant challenges. Funding and consistent support remain primary obstacles, often limiting New Zealand and Pacific representation on international stages, with an unsustainable reliance on volunteer efforts. Funding is frequently year-to-year and highly competitive. Societal misconceptions persist, such as an "80s stereotype hangover" that leads to outdated perceptions of breaking, often reducing it to mere head spins. Similarly, Krump initially faced negative perceptions as "ugly" or "violent". Geographical isolation can also be a factor in connecting with global scenes. There is a risk of losing historical nuance if comprehensive digital archiving is not actively pursued. Internal divides exist, stemming from philosophical differences between freestyle and choreography, and distinct norms between styles like b-boying and krump. However, what might appear as "segregation" in Waacking and Vogue can also be interpreted as a constructive response for self-preservation and empowerment within marginalised communities.

Initiatives Promoting Unity and Inclusivity

Despite these challenges, numerous initiatives actively foster unity and collaboration within the New Zealand street dance community. Community events like Projekt Feel Good successfully bring together diverse hip hop communities. All-styles competitions, such as Red Bull Dance Your Style and the HHI NZ National Championship, serve as crucial platforms for various styles and crews to converge and compete. Empowering spaces like The Palace Dance Studio promote self-empowerment among dancers, while House of Iman creates safe havens specifically for "queer brown people". Furthermore, academic dialogue and research aim to strengthen *taha wairua* (spiritual well-being) within street dance, connecting the physical practice to deeper cultural and personal health.

Multi-Hyphenate Dancers/Leaders

A defining characteristic of the New Zealand scene is the prevalence of multi-hyphenate dancers and leaders who embody multiple roles as performers, choreographers, educators, entrepreneurs, and community organisers. This interconnected network fosters significant collaboration and knowledge transfer. Notable examples include Rina Chae, Mr. Zee, Josh Mitikulena, Ken Vaega, Mele Taeiloa, and Seidah Tuoai. Their diverse contributions strengthen the scene's infrastructure and reach.

Global Impact and Representation

New Zealand street dancers and crews have achieved significant international recognition, showcasing the nation's talent on a global stage. Parris Goebel and The Royal Family have garnered billions of views across various platforms, solidifying their profound global impact. Ken Vaega's triumph at the Krump World Championships in 2018 further highlights New Zealand's prowess in specific foundational styles. New Zealand crews, such as The Projekt Team, consistently represent the nation at major international festivals. Rina Chae's extensive international career includes performing with global artists like Beyoncé and Justin Bieber, and her role as a K-pop choreography agent demonstrates the scene's diverse professional pathways. The New Zealand scene actively integrates global influences while simultaneously exporting unique expressions imbued with an "Aotearoa flavour" to the world, enriching the global street dance landscape.

Conclusion

The New Zealand street dance community stands as a dynamic and intricate ecosystem, characterised by both vibrant diversity and underlying tensions. It presents a compelling narrative of cultural adaptation, community resilience, and artistic innovation. From its origins rooted in global hip hop culture, the scene has been profoundly shaped and enriched by Aotearoa's unique spirit and communities, particularly Māori and Pacific Islander youth, who discovered in it a powerful channel for identity, recognition, and even a contemporary form of cultural resistance.

While styles like Polyswagg have achieved immense global commercial success and visibility for New Zealand dance, their classification as choreographic rather than

foundational street dance styles is a crucial distinction. This difference stems from their top-down, choreographer-led development, emphasis on set routines, and limited engagement with the improvisational battle and cypher culture that define foundational forms. The ongoing community discourse surrounding authenticity underscores the deep value placed on organic evolution, individual expression, and collective ownership within the foundational street dance community.

Despite facing persistent challenges such as limited funding, societal misconceptions, and internal philosophical divides, the New Zealand street dance scene exhibits remarkable strength. Its deep cultural fusion, robust community-building initiatives, and the impactful contributions of multi-hyphenate leaders position it for continued innovation. The scene's ability to integrate global influences while exporting its distinctive "Aotearoa flavour" ensures its ongoing relevance and growing international presence. Moving forward, sustained investment in community-led initiatives, comprehensive education on style origins, and continued dialogue between diverse dance practices will be essential for preserving the scene's authentic roots while fostering its continued growth and global impact.